The CONQUEST OF CANAAN

By BOOTH TARKINGTON,
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CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. FLITCROFT at breakfast on the following morning continued a disquisition which had ceased the previous night only because of a provoking human incapacity to exist without sleep. The Tocsin had been her great comfort.

"Yes, young man," she said as she lifted her first spoonful of oatmeal, "you better read the Tocsin!"

"I am reading it," responded Norbert, who was almost concealed by the paper.

"And your grandfather better read it," she continued severely.

"I already have," said the colonel promptly. "Have you?"

"No, but you can be sure I will."

"All right," said Norbert, suddenly handing her the paper. "Go ahead."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mrs. Flitcroft. "Here it is in headlines on the first page. 'Defense Scores Again and Again. Ridiculous Behavior of a Would Be Mob. Louden's'"— She paused, removed her spectacles, examined them dubiously, restored them to place and continued, "'Louden's Masterly Conduct and Well Deserved'"— She paused again, incredulous—"'Well deserved Triumph'"—

"Go on," said the colonel softly.

"Indeed I will," the old lady replied.

"Look at the editorials," suggested Norbert. "There's one on the same subject."

"'The best of us make mistakes, and it is well to have a change of heart sometimes.'" Thus Eugene's successor had written, and so Mrs. Flitcroft read. "'An open confession is good for the soul. The Tocsin has changed its mind in regard to certain matters and means to say so freely and frankly. After yesterday's events in connection with the murder trial before our public, the evidence being now all presented, for we understand that neither side has more to offer, it is generally conceded that all good citizens are hopeful of a verdict of acquittal, and the Tocsin is a good citizen. No good citizen would willingly see an innocent man punished, and that our city is not to be disgraced by such a miscarriage of justice is due to the efforts of the attorney for the defendant, who has gained credit not only by his masterly management of this case, but by his splendid conduct in the face of danger yesterday afternoon. He has distinguished himself so greatly that we frankly assert that our citizens may point with pride to'"— Mrs. Flitcroft's voice, at the beginning pitched to a high exultation, had gradually lowered in key and dropped down the scale till it disappeared altogether.

The Tocsin's right about face undermined others besides Mrs. Flitcroft that morning and rejoiced greater, though not better, men than the colonel. Mr. Farbach and his lieutenants smiled, yet stared, amazed, wondering what had happened. That was a thing which only three people even certainly knew, yet it was very simple.

The Tocsin was part of the judge's restitution.

"The controlling interest in the paper, together with the other property I have listed," Joe had said, studying his memoranda under the lamp in Roger's old studio, while Martin Pike listened with his head in his hands, "make up what Miss Tabor is willing to accept. As I estimate it, their total value is between a third and a half of that of the stock which belonged to her."

"But this boy—this Flitcroft," said Pike feebly; "he might"—

"He will do nothing," interrupted Joe. "The case is 'settled out of court,' and even if he were disposed to harass you he could hardly hope to succeed, since Miss Tabor declines either to sue or to prosecute."

The judge winced at the last word. "Yes—yes, I know, but he might—he might—tell."

"I think Miss Tabor's influence will prevent. If it should not—well, you're not in a desperate case by any means. You're involved, but far from stripped. In time you may be as sound as ever. And if Norbert tells there's nothing for you to do but to live it down." A faint smile played upon Joe's lips as he lifted his head and looked at the other. "It can be done, I think."

It was then that Ariel, complaining of the warmth of the evening, thought it possible that Joe might find her fan upon the porch and as he departed whispered hurriedly, "Judge Pike, I'm not technically in control of the Tocsin, but haven't I the right to control its policy?"

"I understand," he muttered. "You mean about Louden—about this trial"—

"That is why I have taken the paper."

"You want all that changed, you mean?"

She nodded decisively. "From this instant, before morning."

"Oh, well, I'll go down there and give the word." He rubbed his eyes wearily with big thumbs. "I'm through fighting. I'm done. Besides, what's the use? There's nothing more to fight."

"Now, judge," Joe said as he came in briskly, "we'll go over the list of that unincumbered property, if you will."

This unincumbered property consisted of Beaver Beach and those other belonging of the judge which he had not dared to mortgage. Joe had somehow explained their nature to Ariel, and these, with the Tocsin, she had elected to accept in restitution.

"You told me once that I ought to look after my own property, and now I will. Don't you see?" she cried to Joe eagerly. "It's my work!" She resolutely set aside every other proposition, and this was the quality of mercy which Martin Pike found that night.

There was a great crowd to hear Joe's summing up at the trial, and those who succeeded in getting into the courtroom declared that it was worth the struggle. He did not orate,

"I understand," he muttered. "You mean about Louden"—

he did not "thunder at the jury," nor did he slyly flatter them. He did not overdo the confidential, nor seem so secure of understanding beforehand what their verdict would be that they felt an instinctive desire to fool him. He talked colloquially, but clearly, without appeal to the pathetic and without garnitures, not mentioning sunsets, birds, oceans, homes, the glorious old state or the happiness of liberty, but he made everybody in the room quite sure that Happy Fear had fired the shot which killed Cory to save his own life. And that, as Mr. Bradbury remarked to the colonel, was "what Joe was there for!"

Ariel's escort was increased to four that day. Mr. Ladew sat beside her, and there were times when Joe kept his mind entirely to the work in hand only by an effort, but he always succeeded. The sight of the pale and worshiping face of Happy Fear from the corner of his eye was enough to insure that. And people who could not get near the doors, asking those who could, "What's he doin' now?" were answered by variations of the one formula, "Oh, jest walkin' away with it!"

Once the courtroom was disturbed and set in an uproar which even the judge's customary threat failed to subdue. Joe had been talking very rapidly and having turned the point he was making with perfect dexterity, the jury listening eagerly, stopped for a moment to take a swallow of water. A voice rose over the low hum of the crowd in a delirious chuckle, "Why don't somebody 'head him off?'" The room instantly rocked with laughter, under cover of which the identity of the sacrilegious chuckler was not discovered, but the voice was the voice of Buckalew, who was incredibly surprised to find that he had spoken aloud.

The jury were "out," after the case had been given to them, seventeen minutes and thirty seconds by the watch Claudine held in her hand. The little man, whose fate was now on the knees of the gods, looked pathetically at the foreman and then at the face of his lawyer and began to shake violently, but not with fright. He had gone to the jail on Joe's word, as a good dog goes where his master bids, trustfully, and yet Happy had not been able to keep his mind from considering the horrible chances. "Don't worry," Joe had said. "It's all right. I'll see you through." And he had kept his word.

The little man was cleared.

It took Happy a long time to get through what he had to say to his attorney in the anteroom, and even then, of course, he did not manage to put it in words, for he had "broken down" with sheer gratitude. "Why, d—n me, Joe," he sobbed, "if ever I—if ever you—well, by God, if you ever"— This was the substance of his lingual accomplishment under the circumstances. But Claudine threw her arms around poor Joe's neck and kissed him.

Many people were waiting to shake hands with Joe and congratulate him. The trio, taking advantage of seats near the rail, had already done that (somewhat uproariously) before he had followed Happy, and so had Ariel and Ladew, both, necessarily, rather hurriedly. But in the corridors he found, when he came out of the anteroom, clients, acquaintances, friends—old friends, new friends and friends he had never seen before—everybody beaming upon him and wringing his hand, as if they had been sure of it all from the start.

They gathered round him if he stopped for an instant and crowded after him admiringly when he went on again, making his progress slow. When he finally came out of the big doors into the sunshine, there were as many people in the yard as there had been when he stood in the same place and watched the mob rushing his client's guards. But today their temper was different, and as he paused a moment, looking down on the upturned, laughing faces, with a hundred jocular and congratulatory salutations shouted up at him, somebody started a cheer, and it was taken up with thunderous good will.

There followed the interrogation customary in such emergencies, and the anxious inquirer was informed by four or five hundred people simultaneously that Joe Louden was all right.

"Head him off!" bellowed Mike Sheehan, suddenly darting up the steps. The shout increased, and with good reason, for he stepped quickly back within the doors and, retreating through the building, made good his escape by a basement door.

He struck off into a long detour; but, though he managed to evade the crowd, he had to stop and shake hands with every third person he met. As he came out upon Main street again he encountered his father.

"Howdy do, Joe?" said this laconic person and offered his hand. They shook briefly. "Well," he continued, rubbing his beard, "how are ye?"

"All right, father, I think."

"Satisfied with the verdict?"

"I'd be pretty hard to please if I weren't," Joe laughed.

Mr. Louden rubbed his beard again. "I was there," he said, without emotion.

"At the trial, you mean?"

"Yes." He offered his hand once more, and again they shook. "Well, come around and see us," he said.

"Thank you. I will."

"Well," said Mr. Louden, "good day, Joe."

"Good day, father."

The young man stood looking after him with a curious smile. Then he gave a slight start. Far up the street he saw two figures—one a lady's in white, with a wide white hat; the other a man's, wearing recognizably clerical black. They seemed to be walking very slowly.

It had been a day of triumph for Joe, but in all his life he never slept worse than he did that night.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HE woke to the chiming of bells, and as his eyes slowly opened the sorrowful people of a dream, who seemed to be bending over him, weeping, swam back into the darkness of the night whence they had come and returned to the imperceptible, leaving their shadows in his heart. Slowly he rose, stumbled into the outer room and released the fluttering shade, but the sunshine, springing like a golden lover through the open window, only dazzled him and found no answering gladness to greet it or joy in the royal day it heralded.

It would be an hour at least before time to start to church, when Ariel expected him. He stared absently up the street, then down and, after that, began slowly to walk in the latter direction with no very active consciousness or care of where he went. He had fallen into a profound reverie, so deep that when he had crossed the bridge and turned into a dusty road which ran along the river bank he stopped mechanically beside the trunk of a fallen sycamore and, lifting his head for the first time since he had set out, looked about him with a melancholy perplexity, a little surprised to find himself there.

For this was the spot where he had first seen the new Ariel, and on that fallen sycamore they had sat together. "Remember, across Main street bridge at noon!" And Joe's cheeks burned as he recalled why he had not understood the clear voice that had haunted him. But that shame had fallen from him; she had changed all that, as she had changed so many things. He sank down in the long grass, with his back against the log, and stared out over the fields of tall corn shaking in a steady wind all the way to the horizon.

"Changed so many things?" he said, half aloud. "Everything!" Ah, yes, she had changed the whole world for Joseph Louden—at his first sight of her! And now it seemed to him that he was to lose her, but not in the way he had thought.

Almost from the very first he had the feeling that nothing so beautiful as that she should stay in Canaan could happen to him. He was sure that she was but for the little while, that her coming was like the flying petals of which he had told her.

"Changed so many things?"

The bars that had been between him and half of his world were down, shattered, never more to be replaced, and the ban of Canaan was lifted. Could this have been save for her? And upon that thought he got to his feet, uttering an exclamation of bitter self reproach, asking himself angrily what he was doing. He knew how much she gave him, what full measure of her affection. Was not that enough? Out upon you, Louden! Are you to sulk in your tent, dour in the gloom, or to play a man's part, and if she be happy turn a cheery face upon her joy?

And thus this pilgrim recrossed the bridge, emerging to the street with his head up, smiling, and his shoulders thrown back, so that none might see the burden he carried.

Ariel was waiting on the porch for him. She wore the same dress she had worn that Sunday of their tryst—that exquisite dress, with the faint lavender overtint, like the tender colors of the beautiful day he made his own. She had not worn it since, and he was far distant when he caught the first flickering glimpse of her through the lower branches of the maples, but he remembered. And again, as on that day, he heard a faraway, ineffable music, the elfland horns, sounding the mysterious reveille which had wakened his soul to her coming.

She came to the gate to meet him and gave him her hand in greeting without a word—or the need of one—from either. Then together they set forth over the sun flecked pavement, the maples swishing above them, heavier branches crooning in the strong breeze, under a sky like a Della Robbia background. And up against the glorious blue of it some laughing, invisible god was blowing small rounded clouds of pure cotton, as children blow thistledown.

When he opened her parasol as they came out into the broad sunshine beyond upper Main street there was the faintest mingling of wild roses and cinnamon loosed on the air.

"Joe," she said, "I'm very happy!"

"That's right," he returned heartily. "I think you always will be."

"But, oh, I wish," she went on, "that Mr. Arp could have lived to see you come down the courthouse steps!"

"God bless him!" said Joe. "I can hear the 'argument.'"

"Those dear old men have been so loyal to you, Joe."

"No," he returned; "loyal to Eskew."

"To you both," she said. "I'm afraid the old circle is broken up. They haven't met on the National House corner since he died. The colonel told me he couldn't bear to go there again."

"I don't believe any of them ever will," he returned. "And yet I never pass the place that I don't see Eskew in his old chair. I went there last night to commune with him. I couldn't sleep, and I got up and went over there. They'd left the chairs out, the town was asleep, and it was beautiful moonlight"—

"To commune with him? What about?"

"You."

"Why?" she asked, plainly mystified.

"I stood in need of good counsel," he answered cheerfully, "or a friendly word, perhaps, and as I sat there after awhile it came."

"What was it?"

"To forget that I was sodden with selfishness, to pretend not to be as full of meanness as I really was. Doesn't that seem to be Eskew's own voice?"

"Weren't you happy last night, Joe?"

"Oh, it was all right," he said quickly. "Don't you worry."

And at this old speech of his she broke into a little laugh, of which he had no comprehension.

"Mamie came to see me early this morning," she said after they had walked on in silence for a time. "Everything is all right with her again—that is, I think it will be. Eugene is coming home. And," she added thoughtfully, "it will be best for him to have his old place on the Tocsin again. She showed me his letter, and I liked it. I think he's been through the fire"—

Joe's distorted smile appeared. "And has come out gold?" he asked.

"No," she laughed, "but nearer it. And I think he'll try to be more worth her caring for. She has always thought that his leaving the Tocsin in the way he did was heroic. That was her word for it. And it was the finest thing he ever did."

"I can't figure Eugene out." Joe shook his head. "There's something behind his going away that I don't understand." This was altogether the truth, nor was there ever to come a time when either he or Mamie would understand what things had determined the departure of Eugene Bantry, though Mamie never questioned, as Joe did, the reasons for it or doubted those Eugene had given her, which were the same he had given her father, for she was content with his return.

Again the bells across the square rang out their chime. The paths were decorously enlivened with family and neighborhood groups bound churchward, and the rumble of the organ, playing the people into their pews, shook on the air. And Joe knew that he must speak quickly if he was to say what he had planned to say before he and Ariel went into the church.

"Ariel!" He tried to compel his voice to a casual cheerfulness, but it would do nothing for him except betray a desperate embarrassment.

She looked at him quickly and as quickly away. "Yes?"

"I wanted to say something to you, and I'd better do it now, I think—before I go to church for the first time in two years." He managed to laugh, though with some ruefulness, and continued stammeringly, "I want to tell you how much I like him—how much I admire him"—

"Admire whom?" she asked, a little coldly, for she knew.

"Mr. Ladew."

"So do I," she answered, looking straight ahead. "That is one reason why I wanted you to come with me today."

"It isn't only that. I want to tell you—to tell you"— He broke off for a second. "You remember that night in my office before Fear came in?"

"Yes, I remember."

"And that I—that something I said troubled you because it—it sounded as if I cared too much for you"—

"No; not too much." She still looked straight ahead. They were walking very slowly. "You didn't understand. You'd been in my mind, you see, all those years, so much more than I in yours. I hadn't forgotten you. But to you I was really a stranger"—

"No, no!" he cried.

"Yes, I was," she said gently, but very quickly. "And I—I didn't want you to fall in love with me at first sight. And yet—perhaps I did! But I hadn't thought of things in that way. I had just the same feeling for you that I always had—always! I had never cared so much for any one else, and it seemed to me the most necessary thing in my life to come back to that old companionship. Don't you remember—it used to trouble you so when I would take your hand? I think I loved your being a little rough with me. And once when I saw how you had been hurt, that day you ran away"—

"Ariel!" he gasped helplessly.

"Have you forgotten?"

He gathered himself together with all his will. "I want to prove to you," he said resolutely, "that the dear kindness of you isn't thrown away on me. I want you to know what I began to say—that it's all right with me, and I think Ladew"— He stopped again. "Ah, I've seen how much he cares for you!"

"Ah, I've seen how much he cares for you!"

"Have you?"

"Ariel," he said, "that isn't fair to me, if you trust me. You could not have helped seeing"—

"But I have not seen it," she interrupted, with great calmness. After having said this, she finished truthfully: "If he did, I would never let him tell me. I like him too much."

"You mean you're not going to"—

Suddenly she turned to him. "No!" she said, with a depth of anger he had not heard in her voice since that long ago winter day when she struck Eugene Bantry with her clinched fist. She swept over him a blinding look of reproach. "How could I?"

And there, upon the steps of the church, in the sudden, dazzling vision of her love, fell the burden of him who had made his sorrowful pilgrimage across Main street bridge that morning.

THE END.

DOGLESS TOWN IN INDIANA.

CARMI, Ill., July 27.—Owing to drastic measures adopted by the village administration in Clynthiana, Ind., a little hamlet across the Wabash River, not a dog can be found in the village. All were slain after an epidemic of hydrophobia.

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